



Pig Alley

Dobuita Street worms its way for several blocks from a point starting near the Yokosuka naval base's main gate. Every American sailor pulling liberty in the seaport over recent decades has strolled it, often finding drunken trouble there, although probably not knowing its name. *Dobuita* means "Plank Over a Ditch," but the



narrow street also goes by the nickname of "Pig Alley," maybe because *buita*, when pronounced carelessly, sounds like *buta*, which means "pig," or maybe because of the pig-gish manners of American and Japanese sailors looking for cheap thrills, cheap booze and cheap sex. An early Japanese film, called "Pigs and Battle-

ships," focused on Dobuita Street. But nothing is cheap in Japan anymore. Nowadays a penny is damned near a yen, and the days when a dollar brought 360 yen are gone forever. The street has been tamed and sanitized as I discovered when I looked around on a warm December morning. Lamp-post flags wished Dobuita Street shoppers a merry Christmas. But there was still some action for sailors who could afford it, and sailors who spend a lot of time at sea often have money in their pockets. Two sailors off the *USS Kitty Hawk*, one sporting tattoos, admitted they could drink more cheaply on the base, but they sat nevertheless on a bench outside a rock music bar, waiting for the joint to open. Anyway, you are more likely to get laid in town — a sailor's fondest wish.





A little farther along Dobuita Street, in front of the still-shuttered Cotton Club bar, I ran into a pair of spick-and-span uniformed Japanese military academy students, squeaky neat compared to the two American sailors. Above,

Yoshi helped me with translations. One cadet was 19 years old, the other 20, and they were exploring famous Pig Alley like generations before them. Nearly 50 years earlier, a young sailor named Armand Richard strolled this street,

then more crowded and gaudy as shown in the photo below. Armand was a petty officer in the *USS Colahan's* radio gang while I was the destroyer's communications officer. When he comes to mind after all these years, it's not as a sailor on liberty in Pig Alley, but as a looming flashlight in my dark stateroom as he woke me in wee hours to sign off on incoming messages. Nowadays his email from Massachusetts does not disturb my sleep in California. My brief visit to Yokosuka's Dobuita Street came almost two weeks before I returned home from Japan. It was interesting to me, and something of a surprise, that every time I mentioned little Dobuita-*Dori* at bars in the mountains and parties in Tokyo, Japanese people were already familiar with it.

